

Principal Developments in World Communist Affairs

19 October-22 November 1968

1. The month between mid-October and mid-November 1968 has been one of increasingly hectic activity and serious problems for the troubled world of Communism outside the Soviet Union. But inside the Soviet Union, the celebration of the 51st anniversary of the Bolshevik takeover of Russia limited itself prosaically to routine matters of economics, agriculture, improvement of Party spirit, etc., avoiding any spectacular initiatives. The leadership seemed to find comfort and reassurance in the imitation of the "good old days" of Stalinism when nothing (except perhaps the routine extermination of a few "enemies" of the Party) ruffled the surface appearance of complete harmony and unanimity. If there are divisions in the Politburo over the handling of the Czech crisis, the Politburo is doing a good job of hiding them. Outside the privileged confines of the party, even the obstinate persistence of protest in the Soviet Union was overshadowed by turmoil on the international Communist scene, all related to the continuing Czech crisis:

a. The Czechoslovak Communist Party (CzCP) finally (14-16 November) held its long postponed Central Committee Plenum, which resulted in further concessions to Soviet pressures.

b. The Polish Communist Party, known as the PZPR, held its Fifth Congress 11-16 November, during which the expected factional struggle for power was subordinated to the overriding importance of maintaining the appearance of unity in the face of the deep divisions in the World Communist Movement.

c. The Polish Congress did become the occasion for Party boss Gomulka contemptuously to serve notice on free world Communist parties to mind their own business rather than that of the parties in power and to listen to the wiser counsel of the latter.

d. Meanwhile, French and Italian CP delegations visited Moscow to plead what they deeply believed was a reasonable cause in the interests of world Communism, only to return home empty-handed and chastened, dismayed at the realization of how little their views counted with the Soviet "Center." On the other side of the world, the strong Japanese Communist Party also learned that its views count for nothing, since its criticism of the Soviet Party resulted only in a counterstream of abuse from the Center.

e. The Polish Party Congress was also noteworthy as the platform from which Brezhnev personally expounded the doctrine of super-sovereignty.

f. Against this background of turbulent public dissension, 67 "workers' and Communist parties" met in Budapest on 18 November for four days of debate to decide on a date for a full scale World Communist Conference.

The significant features of each of these events are summarized below.

2. The Czech Situation

The trend evident last month of gradual concessions to Soviet demands by the Czech leadership continued this month, but popular protest and resistance was more vigorous and expressive than anyone would have had a right to expect. Before the CzCP Plenum, the Dubcek leadership moved to curb press freedom by discontinuing or suspending journals critical of the Soviet Union, including the outspoken Politika, journal of the CC/CzCP itself. The Plenum confirmed that censorship will become increasingly strict, which has caused the journalists to band together to seek ways of preserving freedom of the press. Other concessions to Soviet pressure were restrictions on freedom of travel abroad, expulsion of several Western newspaper correspondents, tougher police measures against demonstrating popular groups, and abandonment of a key feature of the economic reform program: worker councils for participation in the management of enterprises.

The long-awaited meeting of the full Central Committee finally took place 14-16 November and, as its conclusions slowly become known, the expected is being confirmed: the Dubcek leadership is being more and more bent to the Soviet will, which is most ominously expressed by the increase in numbers and influence of anti-Dubcek, pro-Moscow conservatives in key positions in the Party.

The up-and-coming conservative seems to be Lubomir Strougal, who was, among other things, for many years Minister of Interior (police boss) in the old Stalinist regime of Novotny. He has been a Deputy Premier in the post-Novotny regime, but now, in a unique allocation of responsibilities, he has been given no less than four Party jobs: member of the elite Presidium (Politburo), member of the new 8-man Presidium Executive Committee (the elite of the elite), a Secretary of the Central Committee, and head of the Party's Bureau of Czech Affairs. If he is Moscow's man, he is in an excellent position to serve the Soviets well.

Students have obeyed the CzCP leaders' plea not to demonstrate in the streets and have instead shown their displeasure by occupying university buildings in Western style "sit-ins." They successfully appealed to the workers to support their show of resistance and, while they voluntarily called off their sit-in, they have showed themselves a political factor to be reckoned with. Though it is widely said that the outbreaks of popular protest are directed against the Dubcek leadership, it seems equally likely that it is actually a gesture of support for what they believe the Dubcek leadership would really like to do. On this supposition, the unique union of Communist leadership motivations and popular sentiment may still be intact and act as a deterrent to Soviet wishes to remove the Dubcek leadership altogether.

3. The Polish CP Congress

The Fifth Congress of the Polish United Workers Party (PZPR), as the Polish CP is called, was held 11-16 November. Major realignments in key positions in the Party which were expected to materialize as a result of the jockeying for power that has been going on for the past several months did not take place. Gomulka, who many thought was aging and ailing, vigorously reasserted his tough-line leadership, strongly backed by Brezhnev, who attended the Congress. A significant contender for power, Mieczyslaw Moczar, who at the last Central Committee Plenum was raised to the rank of candidate member of the Politburo, failed to move up and remained in this second-rank position. The generally accepted explanation for the lack of significant leadership changes is that, with the uncertainty generated by the Czech crisis, the Soviets wanted no waves to rock the boat and decided to make their preference for the dependable Gomulka quite clear. They did not allow into the top leadership uncertain figures like Moczar who, while a no-nonsense hard-liner, bases his strength on the nationalistic, if not the anti-Soviet, feelings of the Poles. Emphasis on sovereignty, much less on nationalism, is not currently in vogue with the Soviets.

What changes in policy, if any, the composition of the new Central Committee portends, no one can say. The prospect is for continuation of unswerving obedience to the CPSU line, of a hard line domestically and of obscure maneuverings for influence over policy by would-be rivals of Gomulka.

4. Gomulka Lectures Western CP's

Gomulka, obediently reflecting the wishes of the top boss, Brezhnev, devoted a sizeable part of his major Congress speech on 12 November to lecturing CP's of the free world on the facts of Communist life. He put both the French and Italian CP's in their place for having presumed to differ with the Soviet Union and the other Warsaw Pact powers that invaded Czechoslovakia last August. Gomulka pointed out that CP's in power have graver responsibilities than those in the capitalist world, which are merely in the opposition trying to attain power. (One could almost sense the contempt in which Gomulka holds these mass parties which for 45 years have tried in vain to come to power.) With scarcely veiled sarcasm, he castigated the parties which repudiated the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia for what he alleged is their "demand" that "the fraternal parties that are in power and bear the responsibility for the development and strength of their countries and of the entire socialist system should adapt their political line at a given moment, to the tactics used by [parties in the free world]...." In an open appeal for support of the Soviet Bloc directed over the heads of the PCF and PCI leadership to the rank-and-file, Gomulka continued:

"The workers in many capitalist countries rightly oppose these attacks on the Soviet Union and other countries of our camp, irrespective of by whom and from what positions these

attacks are made. The attitude of every communist and workers' party toward the USSR and other socialist countries should be determined by the struggle waged between the two systems and should reflect internationalist understanding of the requirements of this struggle."

5. PCF, PCI, JCP vs. CPSU

A French Communist Party delegation returned from Moscow, and an Italian Communist Party group returned from the Polish Congress and later from Moscow, with no concessions from the "Center" of Communist power and wisdom. The former group presented a somewhat less adamant attitude of condemnation of the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia, while the latter party doggedly insisted that the Soviets were following a mistaken policy. It is evident from Gomulka's remarks that the Soviet Bloc is far from trying to conciliate the CP's of the free world; on the contrary, his relatively polite language very probably is the public version of a severe tongue-lashing administered to these dissidents in private by the CPSU.

Since the public stances of the PCF and PCI have observed the proprieties of politeness, public criticism by the Bloc has been similarly veiled. But in the case of the Japanese Communist Party (JCP), which criticized the Soviets in blunt, forthright terms, the Soviets used the most violent invective.

6. The Brezhnev-Kovalev Doctrine of Super-Sovereignty

In the 26 September Pravda, Sergei Kovalev, an editor of Pravda and Deputy Chief of the CPSU Central Committee Agit-Prop Department, which is the top body for Soviet propaganda policy, justified the invasion of Czechoslovakia on the theory that there was a higher sovereignty than mere national sovereignty, namely a "class sovereignty" which made it a common international duty incumbent on all Communists to place the interests of the "world revolutionary movement" (i.e. of the Soviet Union) above their own individual, party, or national interests. This thesis of what might be called "super-sovereignty" has now been enshrined as doctrine by Leonid Brezhnev, who was the first Soviet top policy-maker to endorse the policy. At the Polish Party Congress he claimed that "it is common knowledge that the Soviet Union has done much for the real strengthening of the sovereignty and independence of the socialist countries." But he went on to say:

"However, it is known, comrades, that there also are common laws governing socialist construction, a deviation from which might lead to a deviation from socialism as such. And when the internal and external forces hostile to socialism seek to revert the development of any socialist country toward the restoration of the capitalist order, when a threat to the cause of socialism in that country, a threat to the security of the socialist community as a whole, emerges, this is no longer only a problem of the people of that country, but also a common problem, a concern for all socialist states.

"It goes without saying that such an action as military aid to a fraternal country to cut short the threat to the socialist order is an extraordinary, emergency step; it can be sparked only by direct actions creating a threat to the common interests of the camp of socialism."

This is merely a re-phrasing of what theorist Kovalev had to say in his much-cited article in Pravda of 26 September 1968:

"The peoples of the socialist countries and communist parties certainly do have and should have freedom for determining the ways of advance of their respective countries. However, none of their decisions should damage either socialism in their country or the fundamental interests of other socialist countries and the whole working class movement, which is working for socialism. This means that each communist party is responsible not only to its own people, but also to all the socialist countries, to the entire communist movement.... The sovereignty of each socialist country cannot be opposed to the interest of the world of socialism, of the world revolutionary movement."

The Kovalev thesis has a precedent in the 14 July Warsaw Letter dispatched to the CzCP by the five Warsaw Pact powers who finally invaded Czechoslovakia the following month:

"We did not have and have no intention of interfering in such matters that are purely internal affairs of your party and your state, of violating the principle of respect for independence and equality in relations between communist parties and socialist countries.... We cannot, however, agree that enemy forces should divert your country from the path of socialism and expose Czechoslovakia to the danger of being torn from the socialist community. This is no longer your affair alone. This is the affair of all communist and workers' parties and all countries which are linked by alliances, cooperation and friendship.... We shall never be resigned to imperialism making a breach in the socialist system, by peaceful or nonpeaceful means, from inside or outside, and changing power relations in Europe to its own advantage....

"In your country, a whole series of events in recent months indicates that counterrevolutionary forces, supported by imperialist centers, have launched attacks on a broad front against the socialist system.... We are convinced that a situation has arisen which endangers the foundations of socialism in Czechoslovakia and threatens the vital common interests of the other socialist countries. The peoples

of our countries would never forgive us our indifference and carelessness in the face of such danger. Our parties bear the responsibility, not only before their own working class and people, but before the entire international working class and the communist world movement, and cannot keep aloof from that obligation. Therefore, we must maintain solidarity and unity in defense of our achievement, our security, and the international positions of the entire socialist community.

"We believe, therefore, that, in the face of the attacks of the anti-communist forces, resolute resistance and determined struggle for the maintenance of the socialist system in Czechoslovakia is not only your task, but ours also." [emphasis added.]

The Bratislava Declaration of 3 August, signed by the five Warsaw Pact powers and Czechoslovakia, used a much more obscure and innocuous-sounding formula: "Support, consolidation, and protection of these [socialist] gains ... is a common international duty of all socialist countries" [emphasis supplied]. This has become the Soviet propagandists' most common way of explaining the invasion of Czechoslovakia and of warning other would-be deviant Communists within and outside the Bloc that serious consequences will ensue for those who do not accept Moscow-defined orthodoxy. The same demand for full obedience to Soviet requirements inheres in the Communist shorthand term: "proletarian [or "socialist"] internationalism." The meaning remains the same, whether expressed bluntly as in the Warsaw Letter and by Kovalev, or in more veiled form as in the Bratislava Declarations and by Comrades Gomulka or Brezhnev. The Brezhnev-Kovalev Doctrine asserts the superior sovereignty of the world Communist movement (under Soviet control) over the lesser sovereignty of any single nation. It is a statement not only of the Soviet intention to keep intact its imperial holdings in Eastern Europe, but also its compulsion absolutely to dominate Communist parties everywhere as its foreign policy arms to further Soviet interests abroad and to help realize the far-off, impossible dream of a whole world modeled on and subordinate to the Soviet Union.

7. Unity or Disarray in the Ascendancy?

The Preparatory Commission of the World Communist Conference met for a third time (a fourth if one counts the first "Consultative Conference" last April) 18-21 November, again in Budapest.

Despite the deep divisions of opinion throughout the international Communist movement which undoubtedly prolonged the meeting, a number of sobering thoughts should be kept in mind: some 67 organizations (nine more than last time), all dedicated to the destruction of the free world's political, social, and economic institutions, were willing to gather under the auspices of the most powerful would-be destroyer -- the Soviet Union. While they may disagree on how best to achieve their goal and on which

tactics help or hinder progress toward their goal at any given time, their common objective is not in question: unity in the aim of destroying and conquering non-Communist society. It is not easy to dismiss the efficacy with which international Communism is regularly able to exploit fissures in the armor of the West and occasionally deliver setbacks of noticeable proportions. For a notable example one need only look at the success of Communist propaganda in mobilizing substantial portions of world opinion against the effort to preserve Vietnam from absorption into the Communist Bloc.

Secondly, while the world Communist movement is in some disarray and the Soviet Union experiences difficulties with some free world CP's because it has damaged their immediate political prospects, the Soviets may yet succeed in welding together a conglomeration of subversive parties capable of continuing to damage free world initiatives toward peace and economic and social progress. The fact that 67 parties were willing to make the effort to unify is tangible testimony to the ability of the Soviet Union to maintain itself as the Center of world revolutionary activity.

Finally, while one may safely assume that others besides the British, Swiss, and Reunion (!) parties, (who were reported as dissenting) raised their voices in Budapest against recent Soviet policies, it is significant that they are doing it in secret, at a meeting sponsored by the Soviets, and probably will not raise these same criticisms publicly. Others, of course, have gone to Budapest to voice their complete support of all of Soviet actions, past, present, and future! One cannot escape the feeling of how servile all the components of this world movement are to the Center. Such servility is at once contemptible and dangerous. How much is ideological conviction and how much is the realistic recognition by all the parties of their financial dependence on the Soviet Center, need not occasion much debate -- most of the parties would cease to exist as even potentially significant forces without direct or indirect Soviet financial support.

It may be of incidental interest to note that the Next Showing of the international Communist spectacular will be on 17 March 1969 in Moscow. Attached is the wordy communique, the chief interest of which may be to see who went and who stayed home.